



The Themes of 'Proactivity' and 'Reactivity' in Achebe's 'Marriage is a Private Affair'

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[Doi:10.19044/esj.2022.v18n10p100](https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2022.v18n10p100)

Submitted: 13 April 2021

Accepted: 25 March 2022

Published: 31 March 2022

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Cite As:

Hussein K.M. (2022). *The Themes of 'Proactivity' and 'Reactivity' in Achebe's 'Marriage is a Private Affair'*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 18 (10), 100.

<https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2022.v18n10p100>

Abstract

The present study sets out to investigate the themes of 'proactivity' and 'reactivity' in Chinua Achebe's 'Marriage is a Private Affair'. First, definitions for these concepts are established, and then the main characters' responses which run in their speeches and actions are pored over considering these definitions. Throughout the present study, 'proactivity' and 'reactivity' are construed as conscious cognitive choices rather than personality traits and acting proactively or reactively (assertively or submissively) is beheld as contextually bound and as determined by what floats on the surface rather than by what hides in the unconscious. Drawing upon the critiques of the concepts of 'proactivity' and 'reactivity', and having in mind that 'proactivity' and 'reactivity', as their lexical meanings may suggest, are two ends for the same dimension of doing something, one could safely claim that despite all Nene's (a character) proactive efforts to cultivate friendship with her in-laws, only after going some way towards the traditional position and reacting positively to the socially- imposed patterns considered to be crucial determinants of her acceptance in the extended family network she is admitted in the cosmopolitan Ibo community. Finding her feet there, she partakes in the construction of a new more open and accommodating Ibo identity. Two other important themes that seem to emerge strongly in the present study are that marriage is a tribal matter that should be framed within allegiance and respect for family

traditions and religious affiliation, and that family can tackle any problem if its members stand as one strong front against any external antagonistic power.

Keywords: Proactivity, Reactivity, Achebe, In-law, Marriage

Introduction

Crant (2000) posits that the word 'proactive' has been developed in different kinds of literature and by multiple separate systems. This point is further emphasized by Berger-Wallister (2012) who allege that the word 'proactive' was coined in the 1930^s within the realm of experimental psychology to denote the 'impairment or retardation of learning or of the remembering of what is learned by effects that remain active from conditions prior to the learning'(Berger-Wallister, 2012, pp. 16-17), and it has, since then, been both used and misused in the different subject matters.

As the above quotation indicates, the original usage of the word 'proactive' associates its meaning with memory inhibition. Considering this meaning in light of the dictionary meaning of the word: '*acting in anticipation of future problems, needs or change*' (Merriam-Webster, Inc. 1994), one could claim that the word's original meaning has metamorphosed, and it has acquired different meanings, probably as a result of being used in contexts independent of the original context in which it first appeared.

Furthermore, Banks, (1999) contributes the insufficiently developed point that the word 'proactive' does not have an equivalent in many of the European languages. A possible justification for this word not to be decoded in the lexical systems of these languages is its lack of clearly conceivable defining properties, which, also, justifies Parker and Pindl's (2017) turning their attention away from empirical proactive/reactive traits embedded in the individual's inaccessible psychological systems of beliefs, attitudes, and values, to the description of observable proactive/reactive behavioral choices that the individual consciously makes in connection with certain situations.

Parker and Pindl's shift from 'proactive/reactive personality' to 'proactive/reactive behavior' is congruent with the purpose of the present study, which seeks to explore the concepts of 'proactivity' and 'reactivity' as behavioral tactics and cognitive choices each of which appears in connection with a special situation that floats to the surface. The present study turns pure psychoanalytic literary criticism outside its scope, and instead, deals with the choice of response whether proactive or reactive as a behavioral choice dictated by contextual variables rather than by personal predilection.

Analysis

Proactive behavior implies the positive connotations of taking initiative and engaging in a self-directed, active role to bring about meaningful

change in oneself or situation (Andersson,2015; Crant, 2000; Covey 1989; Frese & Fay, 2001; Grant & Ashford, 2008; Unsworth & Parker, 2003), and proactive people are creators of change in their environment (Yücel, et al, 2016).

Related to the concept of 'proactivity' is that of 'reactivity', which is broadly defined as the tendency to cope with circumstances rather than to configure them, as opposed to proactivity which involves seeking information and opportunities for improving things (Crant, 2000). Also, the contrast between the two terms is clearly spelled out by Covey (1989) who juxtaposes proactive and reactive tendencies saying that:

The ability to subordinate an impulse to a value is the essence of the proactive person. Reactive people are driven by feelings, by circumstances, by conditions, by their environment. Proactive people are driven by values - carefully thought about, selected and internalized values' (p. 34)

One reads in the above quotation that reactivity is subtly interpreted as being emotional and affective, whereas proactivity is surmised to involve forethought and pre-determination. This point could be ignored as it falls within the domain of psychoanalysis which is, as has just been stated, outside our present concern, but an interesting point also emerges pertaining to proactive reaction as stimulating for others, in contrast to reactive response which implies waiting for things to happen and allowing situations to make decisions in lieu of the reactive response maker. Furthermore, it is implied in the quotation that proactivity and reactivity are not antithetical but could better be thought of as two opposite sides of the same coin or two ends of the same aspect.

Having established the foregoing background, the study proceeds to identify the themes of 'proactivity' and 'reactivity' which, according to our inspection, have a persistent presence in Achebe's ' Marriage is a Private Affair' and are seen throughout the story. To identify the theme(s) of the story, one needs first to get a grasp of its plot, which runs as follows: an Ibo (a Nigerian ethnicity) man named Nnaemeka has deliberately chosen to break away from the demands and expectations of the rural background where he has traditionally lived and to marry an Ibibo woman (another Nigerian ethnicity). By this marriage which has taken place in the city of Lagos -without his family's consent- Nnaemeka has dispensed with community traditions and has opted for a westernized lifestyle on account of being a member of the educated segment of Nigerian society that lives and works in the city of Lagos, and that has been exposed to the outside worldview.

The narrative begins with Nene, a newlywed schoolteacher, poses, with the truth-seeking attitude of an educator, a question to her intended. Upon her engagement, she has demonstrated an earnest desire to pursue the bigger

picture of her prospective marriage by taking the initiative to start the process of establishing a rapport with her family-in-law:

Have you written to your dad, yet (Blaisdell, 2016, p.1)?'

The directness of manner and speech that characterizes this question reflects in a striking way Nene's proactive and practical approach, and her propensity to act upon the opportunity at hand. She acts upon the target which she has just set for herself, thus, Zhang et al's (2019) claim that 'proactive individuals have an action-oriented attitude toward work and life'(p.269) seems to fit her well. She seems to be, as her actions and reactions reflect, naturally endowed with the ability to interact effectively and the tendency to initiate and encourage meaningful change.

Nene's anticipatory move contrasts sharply the passive reactive attitude of Nnaemeka, as suggested by his answer:

No, I have been thinking about it. I think it is better to tell him when I get home on leave (Blaisdell,2016, p.1).

Nnaemeka's answer, that he has not yet written to Okeke (his father) about their marriage comes in a matter-of-fact way that is suggestive of passivity and intentional procrastination. Apparently, he has already predicted his father's response and decided to defer the inevitable confrontation with him until he goes to the village and talks to him in person. What further complicates the matter is that Okeke has just sent him a letter informing him that he has chosen a life partner for him. Nnaemeka enters a state that Kaur (2019) refers to as the '*MUM Effect*' (p. 18), which is stress created by a reluctance to communicate bad news. The word 'mum' originally describes the state of not revealing what one knows, and the reluctance and stress associated with the breaking of bad news, according to Sussman & Sproul (1999), results from the deliverer's anticipation of different responses the receiver might make, namely: defensiveness, disbelief, and emotional distress. Each of these responses entails a different way of handling. The source of Nnaemeka's panic, if we take Sussman & Sproul's point, is that he does not know which self-defense mechanism Okeke's resentment may activate.

It is worthwhile to mention that Nene's proactivity towards letting her in-laws into their happiness hinges on the premise that marriage is a universally celebrated occasion in which the couple rejoices with family and friends, and her naivety about the Ibo ways causes her to fail to comprehend why her in-laws should be an exception. When Nnaemeka tells her that Okeke will not bless their marriage, Nene only says:

That's what you always say. But I don't believe anybody will be so unlike other people that they will be unhappy when their sons are engaged to marry (Blaisdell, 2016, p.2).

Both Nnaemeka's submissiveness as disclosing a reactive mindset and Nene's assertiveness as reflecting a proactive mindset can be better explained as conscious cognitive choices rather than idiosyncratic reactions. The couple seems to differ in their awareness of and familiarity with the way things stack up. Nnaemeka analyses the situation more soundly as he is mindful of his father's rigid adherence to Ibo's traditional ways and of the unlikeliness of obtaining his father's approval on his union with Nene, and this awareness contributes to the feeling of impotence and helplessness.

Feeling helpless towards the whole situation, Nnaemeka decides to wait and see how things unfold when he meets Okeke, and then respond accordingly. Conversely, Nene, who has been described by Purcell (2013) as the cosmopolitan who has been raised in Lagos, and who has a diluted attachment to her ethnic heritage'(p. 84) barely knows the life and culture of her in-laws. Apart from that, the Ibo generally welcome strangers, and Okeke is fond of Nnaemeka. Nene's engagement excitement fills her with optimism and intensifies her appetite to take the initiative and stimulate her husband to action.

Not knowing of his son's engagement, Okeke writes a letter to tell him that he has chosen a god-fearing village girl for him:

I have found a girl who will suit you admirably - Ugoye Nweke, the eldest daughter of our neighbor, Jacob Nweke. She has a proper Christian upbringing. When she stopped schooling some years ago, her father (a man of sound judgment) sent her to live in the house of a pastor where she has received all the training a wife could need. Her Sunday School teacher has told me that she reads her Bible very fluently (Blaisdell, 2016, p.2).

Although Nene's issue has not yet been brought up between Okeke and Nnaemeka, the above message elegantly articulates that Okeke would certainly disapprove of and strongly react against Nnaemeka's choice of Nene. Normally, the choice of a spouse follows a mechanism within the social system through which respect for family traditions and religious affiliation should be shown, and that the choice of a wife for an Ibo is the duty and right of the father. Furthermore, an ideal wife, to Okeke, is the one who has been pulled out of school and left with no opportunities in life, and who, idealistically, has a strict Christian upbringing. Apparently, Nene meets none of these life-partner selection criteria.

Marriage prerequisites stipulated in Okeke's letter are in line with Casimir's (2018) statement about the Ibo marital customs:

In Ibo-land traditional marriage is only valid when two conditions are satisfied. First, it must be arranged by the parents of the admirer. Second, the woman wooed must belong to the same tribe as the suitor'(p.33).

The implication that arises from the excerpt above is that marriage is a purely social construct determined by tradition and culture in a way that promotes and preserves social stability, and that the love bond between the admirer and the wooed is largely overlooked. Typically, in the case of Nnaemeka and Nene, the voice of love is silenced, and marriage is seen as an occasion to show public allegiance to society, and in that sense, the short story's title, which states that marriage is a private affair, is rendered ironic.

Nene's adamant encouragement of Nnaemeka to share their happiness with Okeke leaves him no other option but to disclose the truth of Okeke's objection to her. It is a shock to Nene, and a disappointment to learn that she is not welcomed in her husband's family on account of being an outsider to the Ibo community. What is really sad is instead of reciprocating the sincerity with which she tries to reach out to them and her persistent encouragement of Nnaemeka to write to them, they are repudiating her offhand. Nothing, however, will unleash her wrath on her in-laws, or drive her to abandon her proactive positive mindset in favor of a momentary vengeful frame of mind. What she has just heard does not overwhelm her thinking and planning because she has something higher and more substantial to concentrate on. This aspect of her character typically displays a proactive attitude according to Covey (1989) who states that the essence of a proactive person is 'the ability to subordinate an impulse to a value. Also, Kim (2019) describes the proactive person as 'the one who is relatively unconstrained by situational forces ' (p. 230).

Nene has suppressed the sense of bitterness resulting from being degraded by Okeke's rejection and has presumably resisted the temptation to take the line of thought that she is independent of them in almost every aspect of her life, and she could just walk away from them without a backward glance. Instead, she chooses to deal with this challenge sagaciously because breaking off from them would only mean uprooting her husband from his family knowing the amount of love that binds him to them, as well as that the bigger picture she aspires to draw of her marriage comprises good relationship with her family-in-law. She just coolly ridicules the idea that the tribe one belongs to, should decide who to marry. In the narrator's words:

In the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city, it had always seemed to her something of a joke that a person's tribe could determine whom he married (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 2).

The idea of the cosmopolitan atmosphere in which Nene has, throughout her life, been immersed, is further endorsed by Purcell's (2013)

description of her as '*the educated, urban, professional, detribalized, modern Nigerian woman*' (p. 85).

Perhaps, Purcell is also paying homage to cosmopolitanism, through his portrayal of Nene as an embodiment of cosmopolitan ideals: education, urban lifestyle, detachment from ethnic affiliation, and from traditional ways of life.

Nnaemeka softens Nene's zeal as regards writing to Okeke and she finally leaves the matter to his discretion: '*All right, honey, suit yourself. You know your father*' (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 2). This attitude of being simultaneously pleasantly assertive, and respectfully submissive is a major characteristic of Nene's interactions, as emphasized by Mboya (2019), who states that '*Nene is the confident, sensitive modern Nigerian woman who uses her quiet strength not to antagonize other characters but to get things done*'(p.17).

Among other things, the above discussion seems to highlight the hybrid identity of the Africans who have been in touch with the western culture; the couple follows the western way of personal independence and gets married, but concurrently seeks family consent and forgiveness '*I have come to ask for forgiveness*' (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 3). Not only is Nnaemeka apologizing for rejecting his father's choice, but also for denying his father the right of choice for his son.

...am engaged to marry another girl who has all of Ugoye's good qualities...'
'She is a good Christian,' 'You will change your mind, Father, when you know Nene (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 3).

In his keenness to resolve the conflict with Okeke, or at least, narrow the gulf, Nnaemeka validates his father's criterion of religious commitment as a choice principle by arguing that Nene is as good a Christian as Ugoye (the girl chosen by his father). This point may also suggest that the young generation has not completely broken away from the whole set of values adopted by their traditional societies. In the following dialogue, Nnaemeka tries to present Nene to his father as a good choice according to his (Okeke) standards:

The debate gradually sparks the outrage of Okeke. Nnaemeka has denied him his fatherly duty to arrange his own son's marriage and has rejected the traditional ethnicity-based choice of spouse in favor of a love-based relationship. To Okeke, love matters very little in the selection of a wife: 'I don't love her.'

'Nobody said you did. Why should you?' he asked.

'Marriage today is different...'

'Look here, my son,' interrupted his father, 'nothing is different. What one looks for in a wife are a good character and a Christian background'. Blaisdell, 2016, p. 3).

To give Nene merit over Ugoye, Nnaemeka mentions to his father that she is a teacher as well, obviously thinking that this would promptly settle the competition in favor of Nene. However, what he has said only further subverts Okeke's expectations. Women teachers are especially condemned in Okeke's religious doctrine as they violate the exhortation of the Bible that a woman should keep silent:

' St. Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians says that women should keep silent (Blaisdell2016, p. 3).

The dispute between Okeke and Nnaemeka reaches the most provocative moment when the former demands to know whose daughter Nene is and learns that she is neither from the village nor an Ibo. Marrying from outside the clan breaches the customary rules of the Ibo tribe and is taken by Okeke as personally insulting to him as a father, and consequently, he ends the debate and later disowns his son.

This situation creates in Naemeka a feeling of utter helplessness. His father is very committed to his ideas about marriage and his conviction prevents any argument to be accepted if it contradicts his beliefs. At the same time, he cannot free himself from the feeling of guilt and anxiety caused by letting his father down. Deep inside, Nnaemeka does not consider himself as being ungrateful by refusing to heed his father's wish. He is quite convinced that he has just exercised his right of choice, yet he must, submissively, pay for his affront and accept his father's verdict of disownment.

The above debate between Nnaemeka and Okeke which reflects two irreconcilable perspectives, and probably inconsistent values with respect to the choice of a wife, reveals, among other things, that the elites who abandon their indigenous values in favor of modern western ways put themselves in direct conflict with the dominant cultural power, and to handle the resulting double identity or to seek reconciliation, they need to maintain a thin thread of communication with the society through the adoption of flexible strategies and restraints that reflect them as reasonable and less extreme in their views, vacillating between taking initiatives to promote newly acquired values and conceding to traditional societal expectations. Clearly, Nnaemeka has been given an ultimatum of either breaking up with his fiancé or breaking away from his commitment to his traditional society. To him, both cannot be dispensed with, so he endeavors persistently to narrow the divergence of views and make ends meet.

Later, Nnaemeka formally marries Nene despite his father's objection, and sends him, most likely upon the insistence of Nene, the wedding photo. Infuriated, Okeke obliterates Nene's side of the photo and returns the side featuring his son, with a message saying that he is no longer interested in them: *It amazes me that you could be so unfeeling as to send me your wedding picture. I would have sent it back. But on further thought, I decided just to cut*

off your wife and send it back to you because I have nothing to do with her. How I wish that I had nothing to do with you either (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 5).

Seeing her side of the photo mutilated, and reading the scolding message, Nene could not help but burst into tears. She has been abused and psychologically injured by Okeke, both before and after their marriage. However, she still can surmount such difficult moments so long as she can lean on, and have solace in her husband who, she believes will always comfort her soul and usher her through the most critical moments. Nnaemeka assures Nene that his father is good-hearted and will soon rectify his decision.

Don't cry, my darling,' said her husband. 'He is essentially good-natured and will one day look more kindly on our marriage' (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 5).

Interestingly, the couple seems to cancel each other's debt when, at one point of time, each is exposed to a moment of stress caused by Okeke's manipulative intrusive behavior and each is soothed and comforted by the other. Before involving Okeke in the issue of their engagement, Nene, proactively, tells Nnaemeka not to feel uneasy about his father's expected antagonistic reaction against their marriage plan as she knows Okeke to be too fond of Nnaemeka to harbor a grudge against him:

'But anyway, as your father is so fond of you, I'm sure he will forgive you soon enough. Come on then, be a god boy and send him' (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 2).

Nnaemeka's reactivity is suggested by his soothing of Nene after she has been hurt by Okeke's insulting demeanor, while Nene precociously comforts Nnaemeka when he anticipates an uncompromising reaction against their marriage from Okeke. Anyway, Nene does not let the unpleasant behavior of Okeke sway her from her goal of life. She picks the ray of hope given to her and goes on with her proactive endeavors towards assimilation.

Okeke is not the only one to boycott Nnaemeka/ Nene's connection. Other Ibo villagers denounce it and take a hardline stance on what they see as an unprecedented autonomous marital choice. Okeke thinks it is the work of the devil *'it is Satan's work'* (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 4), an old man proposes a theological interpretation *'Sons shall rise against their Fathers; it is there in the Holy Book.'*(Blaisdell, 2016, p. 4), and another suggests a medical diagnosis *'the boy's mind is diseased and only a good herbalist can bring him back to his right senses'*(Blaisdell, 2016, p. 5). Okeke disregards all the proposals and makes up his decision not to have Nnaemeka and Nene around him anymore.

Rather than nursing the feeling of being ostracized and not worthy of being included, or desperately waiting for Okeke's will to bend, Nene goes on with her incessant endeavors to bring about positive change in her situation and environment, a typical proactive behavior as per the definitions provided

at the onset of the study. She turns her attention to the Ibo community in the city of Lagos and establishes interaction, which later develops into intimacy with them. The Lagos Ibo women treat her in an exaggeratedly nice way suggestive of distancing and discontent rather than of sincere heartfelt welcoming.

The prejudice against Nnaemeka's marriage was not confined to his little village. In Lagos, especially among the people who worked there, it showed itself in a different way. Their women, when they met at their village meeting, were not hostile to Nene. Rather, they paid her such excessive deference as to make her feel she was not one of them' (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 6).

The more lenient and accommodative mind with which the city Ibo community receives Nene as contrasted with their village folks is probably attributable to the former's possession of a glimpse of cosmopolitan spirit in which diversity is acknowledged. Mboya (2019) claims that '*in 'Marriage is a Private Affair' exclusivist ethnicity is domiciled in the country while cosmopolitanism is domiciled in the city'*(p. 14). The city Ibo community does not reject Nene in the same forthright way their village counterparts do. By virtue of being city dwellers, they seem to have been influenced by what Leung, Koh, and Tam (2015) call the '*cosmopolitan orientation'* (p.79), which, according to them, includes '*respect for cultural diversity* (p.79), of which, values of tolerance and respect among different co-existing ethnicities are key elements.

Having proactively intruded on the Lagos city Ibo who has lukewarmly accepted her, provides a precious chance for Nene to prove to them her worthiness of their son. Engaging reactively with social dimensions in her situation seems to be more likely to generate positive results than assuming a proactive mindset. She dexterously reacts to the Ibo community's expectations, projecting the prototype image of a perfect house-wife as portrayed in Akanle et al's (2014) statement that '*Major incentives for marriage and family life are cohabitation, companionship, control economics and regular coital relationships for both procreation and pleasure* (p. 411).

Nene, as the Lagos Ibo women testify, has cultivated commitment, peace, and love in her family and she and her husband live as the happiest couple ever existed, as well as she has given birth to two sons whose love, when Okeke knows of their existence, supersedes his anger with her.

Unenthusiastically, the Ibo women confess that as a wife, Nene outperforms most of them:

Slowly and grudgingly, they began to admit that she kept her home much better than most of them. The story eventually got to the little village in the heart of the Ibo country that Nnaemeka and his young wife were a most happy couple (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 6).

It appears from this quotation and the quotation before it that Nene has lived up to the expectations of her host community and has set an exemplary model for what Connellan (2016) refers to as '*the cult of domesticity*' (p.1) which is a celebration of the mother figure and the roles of homemaking and nurturing.

This well-deserved praise draws a new image of Nene among the city Ibo community members, which has repercussions on the core of the Ibo region. According to Mboya(2019) Nene has achieved success within the new Ibo cultural identity reproduced in the city atmosphere. Deducing from this point Mboya postulates that Achebe is probably hinting at the possibility of framing a pan-African identity.

The success Nene achieves in penetrating the cosmopolitan Ibo society tempts her to venture to write to Okeke again. She now has a bundle of joy for Okeke, as she has given birth to two boys who will renew his life and continue his family lineage:

Our two sons, from the day they learnt that they have a grandfather, have insisted on being taken to him. I find it impossible to tell them that you will not see them. I implore you to allow Nnaemeka to bring them home for a short time during his leave next month. I shall remain here in Lagos....' (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 6).

Knowing from Nene's letter of the existence of two grandchildren of his, Okeke undergoes turmoil inside him and a drastic change of attitude towards Nnaemeka and Nene. He realizes that by boycotting their marriage, he has done nothing more than deprive himself of his son and his family all these years.

That night he hardly slept from remorse, and ---and a vague fear that he might die without making it up to them' (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 7).

Okeke's will is bending despite him being resilient, now that he is old enough to be obsessed with the idea of death, and that he might not have time to see his grandsons. The story ends with Okeke feeling perturbed and having a sleepless night during which he sees, in his mind's eye, his two forsaken grandsons outside in the harsh weather, beaten by the torrents of heavy rain. He wonders how he could shut his door against them.

By a curious mental process, he imagined them standing, sad and forsaken, under the harsh angry weather - shut out from his house. die without making it up to them (Blaisdell, 2016, p. 7).

Due to her meticulousness, capabilities, and the fairness of her cause, Nene's efforts finally pay off and she is, probably, fully accepted in the Ibo community.

The present study views Nene as a social change agent. She motivates and inspires change in the community through practical action. She possesses the skills and mindset of a social leader taking initiative, communicating effectively, collaborating productively as well as having a sense of commitment to life-long goals.

Upon her engagement to Nnaemeka, Nene initiates a dialogue with him prompting allegiance to her family-in-law. It does not occur to her that she will be unwelcomed by her groom's father on account of being an outsider and that she will, fundamentally, be at odds with the prejudicial social norms of the Ibo community.

Detecting her actions and reactions throughout her contact with the Ibo community, one notices that Nene acts proactively at times and reactively at others. She seems to act on the spur of the moment as every single situation she encounters may require a different way of handling it. For instance, she acts proactively by initiating earnest dialogue with her procrastinating soon to be her husband. As has been mentioned earlier in this study, her proactivity towards letting her in-laws into their happiness hinges on the universally held idea that marriage celebration is a joyous occasion not for the couple only but also for family and friends. She encourages her soon to be her husband to communicate their plan to his father assuring him that his father's fondness for him would not allow any room for permanent grudges against them when they finally get married. She also acts assertively by personally approaching the strenuously disapproving Okeke more than once. Okeke's disapproval shuts the door to the Ibo community in her face, but she, unrelentingly, turns to the other side and tries to find access through the window; she turns to the more open-minded cosmopolitan Ibo community with whom she has the shared experience of being a city dweller, and with whom she takes part in the enhancement of a new more tolerant Ibo identity. She also acts preemptively by surmounting, in many instances, moments of desperation and failure and by subordinating the fleeting impulses she sometimes experiences to higher goals of life.

Concomitantly, one should not lose sight of her totally different attitude when she indulges in the Ibo social life. She drops the proactive approach and dexterously reacts to the Ibo community's expectations, projecting the stereotype of a housewife, cultivating commitment, peace, and love, and carrying out the roles of homemaking and nurturing, as well as demonstrating allegiance to her husband and his extended family in an exemplary way. Most importantly, she has answered Okeke's dream by giving birth to two of his grandsons, whose love in his heart supersedes the anger,

which has been holding him back from recognizing Nene as a daughter-in-law for so long.

Drawing upon the critiques of the concepts of proactivity and reactivity, and having in mind Banks' (1999) claim, though in a slightly different context, that social change process may require social workers to react to practices that are perceived as unjust or ineffective, it would be feasible to claim that despite all Nene's proactive practices, only after going some way towards the traditional position and reacting positively to socially-imposed patterns i.e. fulfilling the local society's expectations as regards the cult of domesticity referred to earlier, Nene is finally accepted in the Ibo society.

Two important themes that seem to emerge strongly in the ups and downs of Nnaemeka's Nene's union are that marriage is a tribal matter that should be framed within allegiance and respect for family traditions and religious affiliation, and that family can tackle any threat so long as its members stand as one strong front against any external adversary force. However, these two themes fall outside the scope of the present study, and therefore will, hopefully, be dealt with in subsequent research.

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